

QUINCY

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## Trying to catch a fair wind

### Advocates push clear turbine rules

By Robert Knox, Globe Correspondent | May 28, 2009

Wind power advocates in Quincy are backing a new zoning rule they say will enable the city to climb on the wind turbine bandwagon before state and federal renewable-energy stimulus programs run out of funds.

Currently under consideration by the City Council, the proposed ordinance will encourage development of wind power in Quincy and position the city to compete for federal stimulus and state "green communities" grants, supporters say. The city has nothing on its books now to allow siting of wind power turbines.

The proposed rule would require turbines under 250 feet tall to obtain a site plan review permit, while generators over 250 feet will need a special permit. While both permits would be granted by the city's Planning Board, the site plan review is a less rigorous hurdle. The special permit gives the board power to place conditions on the project, including the height of the wind turbine itself.

The ordinance would also require a setback - the distance from the structure to the property line - of 1.5 times the structure's height and would bar wind turbines from dense residential neighborhoods, to protect neighbors' rights.

Backers say that while there's no guarantee that Quincy will win any state or federal grants to support wind power, the sooner the law is on the books, the better - given the competition from other communities.

"There are two ways you can lose," said Larry Chretien, a former city councilor who helped write the proposed Quincy Wind Ordinance. "One way is going slow." Federal government stimulus money for energy projects, he pointed out, has to be spent within strict time limits.

The other way is failing to develop a community wind power project because of worry over the initial costs. "If you build renewable energy, you will be rewarded," said Chretien, director of the nonprofit Mass Energy Consumers Alliance. "If you don't, you face higher prices down the road."

Mark Sylvia, director of the state's newly created Green Community Division, said passing an ordinance making wind turbines an accepted use is one of the criteria communities must meet in order to become certified as a "green community." And becoming a green community, he said, "opens up the opportunity to apply for \$10 million annually in grant funds."

Federal funds are also available, according to the state's energy department. Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles announced last week that \$1.6 billion in federally sponsored zero-interest bonds is available to help municipalities and states finance renewable-energy projects such as wind turbines. Called Clean Renewable Energy Bonds, they are part of the recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

But federal loan guarantees represent a limited pot of money open to all communities nationally, Chretien said. "The money will run out in a couple of years. It's a race on all of them."

Other support avenues for wind power include an investment tax credit, which encourages private developers to build wind turbines for a tax writeoff. Another federal program that may be used to support wind power is a block grant that supports energy efficiency and conservation, which will give the city \$881,000 this year for energy-saving programs. Those funds must be spent within 18 months.

And down the line, Chretien said, developing wind turbines will help the city when the federal emission cap legislation "tilts the playing field toward renewable away from carbon-based energy."

On the state level, a provision in last year's Green Communities Act helps municipal wind turbines pay for themselves. It requires power companies to knock off a bigger chunk of a community's energy bill by crediting wind energy used on town facilities at the retail rate. Currently, that's the difference between earning 5 cents a kilowatt hour versus 13 cents a kilowatt hour from wind power.

Waiting for Quincy to craft a wind ordinance has slowed progress on two large turbine projects - one by Jay Cashman Inc. to power its headquarters at the Fore River Shipyard, and a 328-foot turbine to power the Massachusetts Water Resources

Authority's waste-water screening facility on Hough's Neck.

A number of other communities in this area are exploring wind power and are likely to pursue the same funding avenues. According to Emily Dahl of the state's Renewable Energy Trust, Massachusetts has made support grants of various sorts to 24 communities in this region.

Hull received a \$1.85 million technical assistance grant from the trust three years ago to develop four offshore generators. Most grants, including \$133,000 to Quincy, are considerably smaller and are used for studies to determine whether a project is environmentally and commercially practical.

Cohasset received \$100,000 for its community wind project, but problems with its wind power zoning rule have delayed progress there. Milton, which received a \$78,000 state grant, has plans to build its own wind turbine. Quincy advocates attending a recent City Council session pointed to the recent adoption of a wind power rule by neighboring Milton to urge adoption of their own ordinance.

Councilors responded favorably to the proposal, with a few tweaks. They were scheduled to discuss an amended version of the ordinance at their meeting Tuesday night. Because of City Council rules, a final vote cannot be taken before the June 1 council meeting, at the earliest.

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